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# "For Every Substance is Conditioned to Change Her Hew, and Sundry Formes to Don": The Cultivation of Chastity in Spenser's "Garden of Adonis"

Alyssa Jane Sveden  
*College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences*

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"For euery substance is conditioned / To change her hew, and sundry  
formes to don":

The Cultivation of Chastity in Spenser's Garden of Adonis

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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by

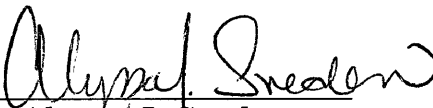
Alyssa J. Sveden

1997

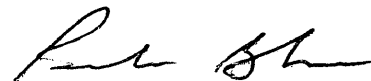
## APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

  
Alyssa J. Sveden

Approved, April 1997

  
Prof. Paula Blank

  
Prof. Christopher Bongie

  
Prof. Peter Wiggins

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
ABSTRACT	ii
TEXT	2
BIBLIOGRAPHY	43
VITA	45

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to propose an alternative reading of Book III in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. More specifically, this paper focuses on canto vi, the Garden of Adonis passage, suggesting ways in which that canto refigures the role of chastity in relation to Elizabeth Tudor, the virgin queen.

Recent critical thought suggests that, despite Spenser's claims to glorify the queen through this poem, the poet actually critiques Elizabeth's decision to remain unmarried throughout her reign. Book III presents the tale of Britomart, the knight of chastity, a figure unique in her gender and self-motivated quest. Unlike those knights that precede her, Britomart does not set out on her journey at the request of Gloriana, The Faerie Queene herself. This study sees the Garden of Adonis displacing the court as the center of Britomart's search. Moreover, the Garden serves as a site which advocates the productive monogamy that Elizabeth's abstinence will not allow.

Ultimately, this paper proposes that The Garden of Adonis is, in fact, an internal landscape residing within the knight of chastity herself. The versions of chastity within Book III present stages within the evolution of Britomart's virtue; however, Britomart ultimately serves as chastity's champion. As such, Britomart actively opposes the queen's virtue and establishes an ideal form of chastity that differs noticeably from the sovereign's own. As a whole, then, Book III, signals the beginning of a movement away from the sterility of Elizabeth's court and toward the wild man's pastoral of Book VI.

"For euery substance is conditioned / To change her hew, and sundry  
formes to don":

The Cultivation of Chastity in Spenser's Garden of Adonis

With his announcement "[i]t falles me here to write of Chastity, / That fairest vertue, farre above the reste..." (III. Proem 1), Spenser's poet-speaker begins a book within *The Faerie Queene* which marks a turning point in his allegorical epic. Having braved Redcrosse knight's three-day battle and accompanied Guyon through the snares of the cave of Mammon, the reader enters the "Legend of Britomartis or of Chastity" with a sense of familiarity towards Spenser's allegorical method. Certainly the complexities within the tales preceding Britomart's present the reader with difficulties; however, the basic paradigm underlying Redcrosse and Guyon's quests remains clear throughout. Both knights undergo quests in the name of Gloriana, the Faerie Queene herself. Though they meet obstacles along the way, their ultimate origin and goal remain the same: they come from Gloriana's court and seek an eventual return which will bring glory to themselves and, more importantly in a chivalric framework, to their queen. As the living version of Gloriana, the Faerie Queene, Elizabeth plays a central role in Spenser's epic and, as his letter to Raleigh claims, the poem as a whole intends to serve as an extended hymn of praise to both Elizabeth and England. "In that Faery Queene," Spenser writes, "I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our soveraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land" (16). In Britomart, the female knight of chastity, the reader encounters a figure similar but not congruent to the queen.



that can potentially transform virginal abstinence to married monogamy. Ultimately, Book III champions a version of chastity differing markedly from the queen's own defiant virginity.<sup>1</sup> Through Britomart, Book III begins a movement away from the earlier quests which find their genesis and culmination in Gloriana, slyly foreshadowing the atmosphere of Book VI which decidedly and purposefully removes itself from the court.

Appropriately, then, the core of Book III is not the court but the Garden of Adonis. On first reading, Spenser's migration to the Garden's landscape appears to distance the reader from the book's focus on Britomart and her quest. Despite the sense that the Garden of Adonis passage stands apart from the text, as Roche points out "Spenser (I am sure) did not expect his readers to isolate it from the context in which it has carefully been placed" (117). That deliberately crafted setting is the Legend of Chastity and rather than a departure from Book III's focus on the virtue, the Garden of Adonis provides a model of chaste productivity. To say merely that the Garden "represents" chastity, though, oversimplifies this twenty stanza passage. The Garden's verses do indeed craft an overarching image of an endless creative process. Delving into the undergrowth of Spenser's language, however, reveals a baffling array of allusions and images within the Garden. Efforts at extricating the source and meaning of these stanzas have produced a litany of critical interpretations.<sup>2</sup> Significantly, however, the diversity typifying both the Garden's landscape and the theories which lie beneath it defy efforts at pat categorization. Elizabeth Heale reminds us that " [t]he difficulty of the Garden of Adonis for scholars is the extent of Spenser's eclecticism. He draws his ideas, images and vocabulary from a wide range of sources to create his own

composite metaphor of the very generative impulse of matter" (38). This notion of a composite metaphor does, as we will see, precisely coincide with the very nature of Britomart's virtue. Her chastity is itself a complex attribute, an amalgam of the versions of chasteness discussed in Book III as a whole.

Focusing solely on the Garden for a moment, the reader encounters a shifting landscape that appears both earthy and celestial, symbolic and concrete. There are indeed several strata within the Garden's walls.<sup>3</sup> Stanzas 30-35 describe the Garden as the "first seminarie / Of all things, that are borne to liue and die, / According to their kindes" (III. vi. 30). The Garden, guarded by "Old *Genius*," gives rise to a "thousand thousand naked babes" who are then sent into the world "to liue in mortall state, / Till they againe returne backe by the hinder gate" (32). As mentioned above, much discussion has been generated with regard to many of the Garden's features and the presence of these "naked babes" is no exception. Professors Bennett, Ellrodt, and Hankin, to name only a few, expend great energy in their efforts to establish where Spenser drew his inspiration for these images and what he intended to communicate through them. Ellrodt admits that "the transmigration of the babes...remains unexplained, though not unexplainable" (81). He goes on to speculate that the babes in Spenser's Garden:

*must* be the "seeds" of human bodies or pre-existent vegetative souls of human creatures...in the Garden of Adonis the pre-existent forms are not transcendent: they are *rationes seminales*<sup>4</sup> immanent in Nature from the first act of Creation.  
(82)

Hankin acknowledges Ellrodt's thesis but goes on to suggest that the presence of the babes can be better explained "if we recall the Platonic view of the soul

as a kind of internal sculptor that shapes *from within* the outward form of the human body" (265). He goes on to explain that after the fleshly body and rational soul have departed from the "vegetative soul" it is again planted in the Garden; "that is, its seminal reasons, with their accompanying forms, are reintroduced there...it becomes active again only when Genius collects the seminal reasons for another 'babe' to go out into the world..." (265).

Ultimately, however, Hankin moves away from his study of the individual elements within the Garden's tangled undergrowth and summarizes the Garden's process in its entirety. "So as far as human generation is concerned," explains Hankin, "...[t]he garden is a place of generation and growth...it is...a place of conservation, in which the seminal reasons (like the genes) are preserved throughout the vicissitudes of time" (266). Without dismissing the usefulness of explicating the Garden's individual images, ideas, etc., it is this type of perspective, that of one standing by the gates and observing the Garden's reproductiveness as a whole, that I view as most helpful in my reading of Book III.

Though the Garden of Adonis passage justifiably elicits a sense of bewilderment from its readers, it is important to remember that it lies at the heart of Britomart's quest: a journey which is itself an amalgam of the disparate and seemingly contradictory elements of chastity and sexuality, femininity and knightly fortitude. Some critics approach the Garden's complexity and its resulting ambiguity with anxiety.<sup>5</sup> The lack of certainty that a reader might encounter when confronted by the Garden's incongruities, however, is among many of the features that make it such an apt complement to Britomart's virtue. As we will see, her quest is initiated by

the promise of progeny and longevity but with the condition that she find and unite with Artegall. The risk of involving herself in this quest includes failure and also the danger of surrendering her abstinent virginity to the chaste sexuality that will result in a fruitful royal line. Ultimately, as Boehrer reminds us, "the desire for unimpeachable authority, the desire for secure issue, the desire, in its simplest sense for *virtue*: these are at the last the model for the Legend of Chastity" (569). Britomart's chastity, then, is a virtue in process and could only arise from the soil of such a place as the Garden of Adonis. Its eternal mutability allows not only for *her* reproductive process but that of the entire species.<sup>6</sup>

Before delving more deeply into the Garden's role in Britomart's quest, we return to the Garden passage and its structure. Stanzas 36-38 establish the infinite nature of the Garden's "substance" and its dynamic interaction with "forme." This partnership allows for the Garden's "endlesse progenie" (30) without undercutting its eternal reproductive capacity. Moreover, its role as the fertile and regenerative locus of Book III highlights a fundamental link between the Garden, Britomart, her quest for Artegall and the "renowned kings, and sacred Emperours" to which their "fruitfull Ofspring" (III. iii. 23) is destined to give rise. Stanzas 39-42 discuss the presence of Time and the power of mutability even within the Garden's walls. For, as the narrator reminds us, "all that liues, is subject to that law: / All things decay in time, and to their end do draw" (vi. 40). Ultimately, in stanzas 43-50, the reader encounters Venus and Adonis' chaste sexuality. Their arbor sits, appropriately, "in the midst of [the Garden's] paradise" (43) and, as the

reader progresses out of the Garden, she leaves with a vision of an eternal, chaste and reproductive process.

Again, this schematic reading of the Garden passage suggests a unity of thought and interpretation that simply does not exist.<sup>7</sup> The diversity of opinion regarding the Garden passage need not be considered indicative of gaps in Spenser's own philosophy. As Michael Murrin reminds us:

[The allegorist] does not serve his symbols; they serve him. He throws out various images and shifts them around, trying to get his auditors to participate in his own train of thought, which is both concrete and abstract...he uses his symbols for others, as guides to his meditation. (146)

Therefore, if Britomart's quest is, as I have suggested, a hymn of praise to a vision of chaste productivity directly opposing the queen's own virginity, then the Garden's multiplicity appears entirely congruent with chastity's role as a malleable attribute. Chastity can adapt itself to suit Britomart's various positions as a virgin maid, an aggressive woman warrior and ultimately as a chaste but sexually active wife and mother to a royal line. Like the images within the Garden, Britomart's virtue participates in the poet's allegorical "train of thought." The individual strata or stages within the Garden seem to function, most importantly, as part of a fertile and endlessly reproductive cycle. From the moment the reader passes by Genius at the Garden's gates, she is surrounded by a the constant rhythm of a creative process to which each individual image or idea contributes.

Unlike the libidinous lust of Malecasta or the frightening bestiality of Duessa's sexuality, the desire sown in the Garden occupies a place of honor as signified in Venus and Adonis' arbor: "a stately Mount, on whose round top

/ A gloomy groue of mirtle trees did rise...[and] / like a girland compassed the hight" (III. vi. 43). The garland of myrtle trees encircling the hill suggests a crown and that the "stately Mount" itself lies "[r]ight in the midst of that Paradise" (43), further implies its position of importance and even of reverence. There, sheltered by the cocoon that is the Garden, married sexuality endlessly fulfills itself. "There now," the speaker explains, "he [Adonis] liueth in eternall blis, / Ioying his goddesse, and of her enjoyed." Arguably, the garden here presents the model combination of sexual desire and chaste impulses. For Britomart, then, the Garden assumes a position not unlike that of the court for the other knights.

A significant difference between the Garden and the court, of course, lies in the Garden's intangibility. One could not locate the Garden as one could the court and the poet-speaker acknowledges the ethereal character of the Garden from the outset. It is "so faire a place as Nature can devise: / Whether in Paphos, or Cytheron hill, / Or it in Gnidus, I wote not well" (vi. 29). Without fixing it in any one place, Spenser knows it exists; "in short, Spenser has experienced the Garden of Adonis yet does not know where it is" (Roche 120). Nor does his language indicate a need to pin down its exact site. Spenser's use of the conjunction "whether" suggests, not only that the poet-speaker "wote not" where the Garden is, but that it can be in any and all of the places to which he refers. He goes on to assert that "well I wote by tryall, that this same/All other pleasant places doth excell" (vi. 29). Despite the poet-speaker's uncertainty as to where, precisely, one finds the Garden, he knows "by tryall" that it surpasses any other locale. Geographical uncertainty aside, this assertion indicates, I would argue, that the Garden can be "experienced"

mentally. Embedded within the legend of chastity, the Garden assumes a position of primary importance in Britomart's quest and can be seen as an internal landscape within the knight of chastity herself.

Drawing such a connection between the human and vegetative realms is not, according to Ilva Beretta, uncommon in the Renaissance. Beretta explains that:

...plants, with life cycles similar to man's own, inspired comparisons with man despite their low rank in the chain of being. An example of this type of comparison is found in descriptions of the human soul whose lowest faculty was called vegetal, providing nourishment, growth and reproduction.  
(164)

Beretta goes on to cite Francis Bacon's *Sylva Sylvarum* (1626), in which Bacon extrapolates the similarities and differences between humanity and plants, as an example of:

...an anthropomorphic view of the resemblances and differences between man and plants [that] gives us an explanation of the poetical practice of comparing the life of man with the life of plants and *the garden itself as man's spiritual state of mind*. Plants are perfect symbols of the human life cycle, with corresponding stages of birth, growth, fading, and death. They are also suitable symbols for the transience of life and beauty.

(164, emphasis added)

If a garden represents humanity's "spiritual state of mind," then the ceaseless rising of nature's "endlesse progenie" (III. vi. 30), "goodly flowres, ... infinite shapes of creatures, ..." and the souls of men within the Garden of Adonis implies that humanity inherently seeks productivity. Moreover, chastity cannot remain abstinent in order to fulfill that which is "natural" but must

transform itself to chaste, married monogamy. Interestingly, Spenser embeds plant and animal life in the Garden's rows along side the human life cycle. This fecund atmosphere accounts for nature in its entirety. Elizabeth's unproductive chastity, then, becomes increasingly "unnatural." Notably, the Oxford English Dictionary includes in its definition of chastity, stages of the virtue as defined by sixteenth-century philosopher William Baldwin in his *Treatise of Morall Philosophie, contayning the Sayinges of the Wyse*. "Pure virginity" is the first stage and the second "faithful matrimony." Remaining only in one stage, therefore, implies incompleteness. This migration through phases of chastity toward the wholeness of consummation jars against the queen's virtue of abstinence. Moreover, it points to a delicate dilemma within Elizabethan culture. Philippa Berry notes that a woman's prolonged virginity in general, but Elizabeth's in particular, signifies a "mysterious powerfulness...a body and an identity which had somehow eluded successful appropriation by the masculine" (7). Thus, in Elizabethan culture, abstinent virginity remains insufficient, apart from that cyclical productivity that typifies humanity's "state of mind." Significantly, however, the queen's chastity plays a dual role for her contemporaries. As the monarch, Elizabeth represents the best of the realm. According to the doctrine of "the king's two bodies," Elizabeth's physical being and her divine sovereignty exist separately. As Mary Villeponteaux notes:

the king's body politic, unlike his body natural, is 'void of Infancy and old Age and other natural Defects and Imbecilities'. However, in Elizabeth's case, her body natural and its 'defect' of femaleness became the potent symbol of her reign. Her virginity signifies the power she will not relinquish to a husband, and as Louis A. Montrose has also suggested, her inviolable 'virgin knot' came to signify the inviolable



security of the realm. (32)

Interestingly, then, Spenser creates in Britomart an equally autonomous and powerful female character. Rather than presenting an exact replica of his beloved sovereign, however, Spenser crafts her alter ego. Britomart, a virgin, seeks out the man she intends to marry and thus searches for married sexuality, precisely that which Elizabeth avoids. Moreover, the Garden's cyclical celebration of fertility and reproduction enacts a mythic, idealized version of Britomart's eventual goal, reminding the reader of that which Elizabeth "fails" to achieve.

Britomart, unlike the queen, reaches the final, and presumably complete stage of chastity through her union with Artegall. However, that culmination occurs in Book IV. Within the boundaries of Book III, Britomart is a knight-in-search of her ultimate goal; she and her virtue remain in process, so to speak. The reader witnesses Britomart's evolution of "chaste desire" (III. v. 52). She progresses from the typically passive and heart-sick maid "wast[ing] ... [and] ... wayl[ing] ... through long langour and hart-burning brame" (III. ii. 52) to an epic figure empowered by love and clad in "advent'rous knighthood" searching for married sexuality. She must constantly interpret her own opposing emotions and, ultimately, her productive chastity indicates a successful blending of her sexual desire and abstinence.

This mingling of disparate, even opposing, elements precisely characterizes the Garden of Adonis and strengthens the sense that this terrain lies within Britomart. Blending contrary forces of its own, the Garden is "sited

in...soyle of old" but "fruitfull[y]" (III. vi. 31) gives rise to new life. Its "double gates" (31), as mentioned above, usher out fresh souls while aged ones, "old and dride...returne backe to the hinder gate" (vi. 31 & 32). It is eternal but subject to the arbitrariness of "wicked Time, who...Beates down both leaves and buds without regard, / Ne ever pittie may relent his malice hard" (vi. 39). Amid this temporal framework rests Adonis who, although mortal, is "eterne in mutabilitie" and resides as "the father of all formes...that liuing gives life to all" (vi. 47). The boar, elsewhere Adonis' doom<sup>8</sup>, lies under the very mound on which his and Venus' arbor lies. By presenting these oppositions Spenser contextualizes this idyllic setting within the confines of a threat, thus de-stabilizing but not destroying the procreative union of Venus and Adonis. As we will see, the knowledge of the dangers and limits to any union factors significantly into Britomart's quest. Her own volatile duality of virginity and desire both empowers and endangers her virtue. Ultimately, the chastity of Book III accepts the threat posed by desire as part and parcel of its cyclic nature and inherent oppositions.

To say, then, as Roche does, that Britomart becomes "the supreme example of chastity, who progresses from the role of chaste maiden to that of chaste wife of Justice in Book IV" (166) belies the complexities inherent in Spenser's task of depicting this multi-faceted virtue. As Berger notes: "the atmosphere of Book III is saturated with various kinds of confusion and ambiguity produced by Eros...Desire is ambiguously martial and erotic, wounds ambiguously physical and psychic" (98). In establishing this ambiguity, Spenser blurs the clearly defined boundaries that traditionally typify allegorical characters. A reader sees this book inaccurately if she

assumes that Britomart simply "is" chastity any more than the Garden "is" chaste productivity. Clearly defined opposing virtues do not "face off" in Book III but rather meet in Britomart and the Garden. These ambiguous amalgams typify Spenser's labyrinthine allegory and complicate both the reader's and Britomart's task. Such intricacies, Silberman points out, characterize Britomart's development as "an inescapable battle for interpretation" (60).

Britomart's struggle for definition begins long before her entrance into Faery land disguised as a knight and highlights one of the primary differences between her quest and those of her counterparts. Significantly, Britomart belongs to the "historical" world outside of Faery land and therefore outside of Gloriana's realm. She has an identifiable past as related to her by Merlin (III. iii. 26-39) and is fiercely loyal to that "race of old" from which "she was lineally extract" (III. ix 38), reacting "with zealous envy" (ix. 38) at even the tales of her ancestors' woes in the Trojan wars (ix. 38). Moreover, Britomart has not only a history but, as Judith H. Anderson reminds us, she has:

at least in these two books [III and IV], a future; like Arthur she is involved in historical time. She has a father rather than a myth of origin, a nurse rather than a Palmer, and a destiny firmly on earth; she looks and is much more human than her predecessors among the poem's protagonists -- much as is the virtuous human love she potentially embodies.

(*Spenser Encyclopedia* 114)

Separating Britomart from Faery land differentiates her quest from those of the preceding books in several ways. Most notably, her journey arises not at the behest of the Faerie Queene but from Britomart's own passions (Silberman 21). Initially, however, Britomart does not know how to translate

the rush of emotion that accompanies her vision of Artegall as reflected in Merlin's "mirrhour fayre" (III. ii. 22). Although Spenser introduces Britomart as an aggressive and self-sufficient virtuous force, he brings the reader back to a point before Britomart and her historical realm intersect with that of Faery land. The reader sees the "martiall mayd" in a position of abject helplessness. Eros appears in both its "physical" and "psychic" manifestations as Britomart begins to exhibit visible symptoms of that conventional Petrarchan malady: love-sickness. The figurative arrow of Cupid results in a literal physical decline as the poet-speaker explains that:

...the feather in her loftie crest,  
 Ruffed of loue, gan lowly to auaile,  
 And her proud portance, and her princely gest,  
 With which she earst triumphed, now did quaile:  
 Sad, solemne, sowre, and full of fancies fraile  
 She woxe; yet wist she neither how, nor why,  
 She wist not, silly Mayd, what she did aile,  
 Yet wist, she was not well at ease perdy,  
 Yet thought it was not loue, but some melancholy.  
(III. ii. 27)

Here, Britomart seems unable to recognize the feelings of love that arise after seeing Artegall's image. The tone of the poet-speaker's narration, with its dismissive "silly Mayd" and explanation of Britomart's identifying her love as "some melancholy," suggest the absurdity of her confusion. Yet, at this point, Britomart cannot interpret her own situation. Even after Glauce identifies Britomart's feelings for her, Britomart persists in denying their propriety, a situation that endures through Glauce's pleadings, "idle charmes" (III. ii. 51), and even her attempts at consolation. "Daughter...what need ye be dismayd / Or why make ye such a Monster of mind?" (III. ii. 40), Glauce asks. "...I was affrayed... / Of filthy lust contrarie unto kinde: / But this

affection nothing straunge I find" (40). Britomart, however, finds the insubstantiality of her lover discouraging and disturbing. Inverting convention, the female Britomart invokes the language of a thwarted male Petrarchan lover. Bemoaning the absence of her "cruel fair," Artegall, she exclaims:

But wicked fortune mine, though mine be good  
Can haue no end, nor hope of my desire,  
But feed on shadowes, whiles I die for food,  
And like a shadowe wexe, whiles with entire  
Affection, I doe languish and expire. (III. ii. 44)

Britomart laments the inaccessibility of her lover and voices her own unsatisfied desire. These tropes, however, function differently in Britomart's case. Rather than merely voicing these terms, as we have seen, Britomart bears the marks of physical decay. Her response to her budding love literalizes the conventions and becomes not merely disheartening but menacing. Separation from her love interest leads to deterioration and possibly death. Notably, Britomart recognizes that her feelings stem from within as she goes on to link her own love for Artegall's image with the self-destructive infatuation of Narcissus:

I fonder than *Cephisus* foolish child,  
Who hauing vewed in a fountaine shere  
His face, was with the loue thereof beguiled;  
I fonder loue a shade, the bodie farre exild.  
(ii. 44)

In reference to this episode Lauren Silberman notes that it "attaches the moral opprobrium historically associated with self-love to the danger of mistaking appearance for reality...Britomart interprets Narcissus' fault to be that he mistakenly loves an empty image, Glaucé that he ignobly loves

himself" (24). That Artegall's image appeared after Britomart looks in the mirror "her selfe a while therein she vewd in vaine" and after she "bethinke[s] of, that mote to her selfe pertaine" (III. ii. 22), supports her fears of Narcissism. However, upon visiting Merlin she gains a new perspective in reference to her recently discovered emotions and thus an alternative method of self-interpretation. As Merlin reveals, Britomart's encounter with Artegall's image occurred purposefully through "the streight course of heavenly destiny" (III. iii. 24). With providence as a guide for her unruly emotions, Britomart translates her passive and potentially fatal "wast[ing]...[and]...wayl[ing]" into action. Encouraged by Merlin to "do by all meanes thy destiny fulfill" (24), unite herself with Artegall and produce the "famous Progenie" (III. iii. 22) he promises, Britomart reinterprets her desire. She transforms it from a dangerous dalliance with self-love to a divinely inspired quest, the successful completion of which promises prosperity not only for her but for her entire nation.

Britomart's journey, then, finds its origins within the "martiall mayd" herself but gains its purpose from Merlin and the more courtly motives he espouses. Functioning outside the realm of Gloriana, Britomart sends *herself* forth; as Silberman notes, "she puts on armor as a programmatic means of achieving her desire..." (21). Achieving her desire, of course, means adhering to the political agenda outlined by Merlin. The reader is, however, witness to the gestation and birth of Britomart's passion prior to her "legitimizing" it through the "streight course" prescribed by "destiny:" a perspective unavailable to the reader in the poem's other books.

In effect, Britomart's quest hinges on this type of fluid self-assessment and adjusting of perception. As Roche rightly reminds us, though, Britomart's progression through the text is not akin to the character development of a novel or drama. He warns that "we look in vain for evidence to show this development "'within' the character itself" (53) and instead points to external symbols of change. In addition to Roche's emphasis on exterior signs, I would continue to stress the evolution signified by Britomart's interpretation of the situations and individuals she encounters. Without moving inside the character, the reader clearly understands Britomart's brand of chastity through her actions. Britomart's absurdly comic, almost slap-stick, encounter with Malecasta in the Castle Joyeus (III. i), for example, provides another instance of Britomart's developing interpretive skills. As Britomart enters the castle, the language of the poem repeatedly provides warnings to which Britomart does not have access. The poet-speaker aligns Malecasta with that "proud Persian Queene," (I. i. 41) Duessa, from Book I whose treacherous duality immediately renders Malecasta suspect. The stanza goes on to describe Malecasta as one who "seemd a woman of great bountihed" (III. i. 41). That she merely "seems" virtuous cautions the reader to tread carefully through this narrative. Britomart, however, enters the castle without the benefit of the poet-speaker's insight and must educate herself. Her successful evasion of Malecasta's attempted seduction (II. i. 61-62) does not come without cost as she is wounded by the lustful leer of Gardante (III. i. 65). Significantly, Spenser has Britomart fall prey to that which catalyzed her own quest: the desirous gaze. Gardante's arrow, unlike Cupid's, does not stay but does:

...gore her [Britomart's] side, yet the wound was not deepe,  
 But lightly rased her soft silken skin,  
 That drops of purple blood thereout did weepe,  
 Which did her lilly smock with stains of vermeil steepe.  
 (III. i. 65)

Within the context of the courtly rituals and "stratagems" which Malecasta and her knights represent (MacLean and Prescott 243), the gaze of passion has harmful effects. Malecasta and her entourage present a libidinous sexuality that lacks the purposeful direction of Britomart's quest for Artegall. Spenser's poet-speaker emphasizes the threat posed by the Castle Joyeus as he informs his women readers that Malecasta "was not to loue but lust inclined;/ For loue does not alwayes bring forth bounteous deeds..." (III. i. 49). The dangers inherent in aimless lust are precisely those which Britomart feared prior to Merlin's prophecy and her injury, as Silberman notes, reminds us that Britomart's virtue is not unassailable. The image of the "warlike Mayd" (III. ii. 63) in "her lilly smock with stains of vermeil steepe":

suggests vulnerability, the beginnings of passion, the loss of virginity; it mirrors Britomart's enrapturement at the sight of Artegall and foreshadows her own wounding by the evil Busirane. Britomart's wounding by Gardante...refigures the fate of Actaeon. In place of the erotic chase in which a nominally distinct male subject and female object fatally exchange roles of predator and prey, Britomart pursues a quest in which risk and subjective engagement are necessary conditions for going forth.  
 (Silberman 33)

And indeed, accepting Merlin's command to achieve her goals "by all meanes" implies her willingness to surrender her virginal chastity to married monogamy when she reaches Artegall. In fact, Britomart functions as a willing Actaeon figure. She assumes the position of the hunter while



acknowledging the eventual and inevitable capitulation to her passions; "even in chaste love there must be a surrender..." explains Roche, "...to surrender one's self to love is either to lose one's integrity or to transmute it to a higher unity. The legend of Britomart is an exemplum of this transmutation" (55). And though Britomart is not a direct parallel to Actaeon in that she is not literally destroyed by her desires, her chastity undergoes an irreparable metamorphoses: an ironic tinge of devastation to her "victorious" achievement in finding Artegall.

Britomart's willingness, indeed her urgency, to fulfill her quest despite the risk to which Silberman alludes in the above quotation provides a fundamental link between her figure and the Garden of Adonis. The tensions between sustaining her virtue and eventually acquiescing in victory recall the contraries characterizing the Garden. Amidst the pressures of the Garden emerges the vision of productive and eternal chastity that Spenser champions. The Garden gives rise to "infinite shapes of creatures...Yet is the stocke not lessened, nor spent, / But still remaines in everlasting store" (vi. 35 & 36). Chaste love produces an overwhelmingly active atmosphere and a reproductive process as opposed to the static sterility of Acrasia's Bower of Bliss in Book II. xii. Berger states that in the Garden:

The emphasis is not so much on the thing visualized but on the process of visualizing...Wishing for an image of the fullness of life, the poet evokes it and finds his image to be rooted in death...The vision, vegetative in form, shows the compulsion of nature to repeat. (144)

Indeed, Spenser creates an ethos suffused with dynamic differences that do, indeed, compel the forces within the Garden. Berger's sense that the vision of

life is "rooted" in a vision of death need not be inconsistent with the Garden's endless cycles. Spenser, as we have seen, acknowledges the mortality of outward form while celebrating the eternal substance within:

The substance is not chaunged, nor altered,  
But th'only forme and outward fashion;  
For euery substance is conditioned  
To change her hew, and sundry formes to don... (III. vi. 38)

The image of eternal procreation allows for this cycle of change. And, in fact, Britomart's search for "fruitfull Ofspring" (III. iii. 23) emphasizes a fertility that parallels that of the Garden. Moreover, her quest not only contains the aforementioned knowledge of virginity's eventual surrender but also the "image of death" implicit in the changing "hew[s]" and "sundry formes" within the Garden. When, for example, Merlin reveals that Britomart's future mate is "the prowest knight that euer was" (III. iii. 24) he tempers that happiness with the announcement that it will be cut short. Merlin states that, "his [Artegall's] last fate him from thee take away, / Too rathe cut off by practise criminall / Of secret foes, that him shall make in mischief fall" (iii. 28). Spenser juxtaposes the limitations of Britomart's and Artegall's union against the eternal royal line that their "ofspring" heralds: a line which results, at least in Spenser's poem, in Elizabeth herself. Again, this fear of loss does not paralyze but catalyzes Britomart; the risk is among those "necessary conditions for going forth" (Silberman 33) which allow her to return home with a "lighter heart ... conceiuing hope of comfort glad" (iii. 51)" and plan her journey in search of Artegall.

Moreover, the Garden's ceaseless pressure urges against delay. Time suffuses the Garden's idyllic pastoral landscape with a sense of urgency akin

to the philosophy of a *carpe diem* poem. Its fading flora and constant pressing ahead exemplify the decay and temporality that inspire poets to react against hesitancy and seize opportunities to partake of life. Clearly, then, the "compulsion" to repeat is not limited to the Garden. Chastity is itself "the response to love, and Britomart must learn not to suppress the force which *impels* her but to accept it, suffer it, understand it, build up a habit of will which enables her to direct this energy to a higher goal in the enduring love of human persons" (Berger 138, emphasis added). What impels Britomart is that which compels nature: the desire to reproduce even when confronted with death. As we have seen, Britomart seeks Artegall and the "famous Progenie" promised by Merlin and the Garden presses ever onward, drawing from and adding to its "everlasting store"(vi. 36).

Such a rich atmosphere, naturally, gives rise to more than one species of chastity. Britomart's legend presents a virtual montage of chaste characters unlike Books I and II in which Guyon and Redcrosse are the singular representatives of their virtue. "Spenser's allegorization of Chastity is diffuse," explains Boehrer; "it is dispersed equally among a set of characters who represent the virtue in different, and conflicting, ways..." (563). The proliferation of chastity outside of Britomart does not, I would argue, support Boehrer's sense that Spenser, by dividing the virtue among a number of characters, presents equally viable versions of chastity. Britomart is, after all, chastity's singular knight if not its only representative. Ironically, Belphoebe and Amoret exist, as does the Garden, within the boundaries of Faery land. And, as defined by Roche, Faery land "is the ideal world of the highest, most virtuous *human* achievements...It can be attained as a state of mind but not

as a human society because the time was and is not ripe" (46). If Faery land exists as a "state of mind" so too do the people and places within it. Roche's assertion aligns nicely with Beretta's argument connecting the garden with humanity's "spiritual state of mind" supporting the notion that the Garden of Adonis acts as an internal landscape or training ground for Britomart's virtue. Notably, however, the Garden's chastity, as it is embodied by Amoret and Belpheobe, does not occupy the same position of prominence in the book as Britomart's virtue. Ultimately, then, Britomart must move away from the Garden in order to succeed in achieving her goal.

Belpheobe and Amoret belong to Faery land and, as such, factor into Britomart's quest as points within the evolution of her "chaste desire." Belpheobe and Amoret, twins born to the virgin maid Chrysogenee, are separated at birth (III. vi). Belpheobe, adopted by Diana and raised in the forest, presents a version of chastity frequently linked with that of Elizabeth I. Problematically, though, she is a Faery figure combining "the attributes of myth with those of history, for she incarnates religious as well as political authority within a body that insists both on its femaleness and on its own self-sufficient autonomy" (Berry 160). Straddling the mythic and historic realms complicates Belpheobe's role. If, as Spenser suggests in the proem to Book III and the prefatory letter to Raleigh, Belpheobe serves as a representative of Elizabeth's chastity, then she should be a functional part of the historical realm along with, or instead of, Britomart. However, in Anderson's terms, Belpheobe is "...both an aspiration and an extreme" (47). She admirably and formidably represents chastity; however, the excessive martiality with which she defends her virtue appears, through the poet-

speaker's eyes, gruesome in its "femaleness" and threatening in its "self-sufficient autonomy." When, for example, Belphoebe appears upon the scene of Timias' battle with the three foresters she is hot on the trail of "some wild beast" wounded in the hunt. "[She] pursewd the chace...", the speaker relates:

By tract of bloud, which she had freshly seene,  
To haue besprinckled all the grassy greene ;  
By the great persue, which she there perceau'd  
Well hoped she the beast engor'd had beene,  
And made more hast, the life to haue bereau'd:  
But ah, her expectation greatly was deceaued.

(III. v. 28)

Spenser models Belphoebe after Diana, the goddess of the hunt, which accounts for Belphoebe's gory glee in pursuing her prey. Interestingly, though, Belphoebe's alignment with Diana not only connects her to the goddess' divine virtue but also highlights Belphoebe's threatening nature. Despite the fact that Belphoebe becomes Timias' "savior" and is even said to change her initial vicious "hew" (v. 27), Belphoebe finds Timias because she mistakes his blood for that of her prey. She does, in fact, track the ailing squire. Timias, as a potential figure of masculine desire, can be seen as a substitute for the properly ambiguous "wild beast." Moreover, his eventual transformation from a squire with courtly aspirations to a wild man with "rude and rugged haire" (IV. vii. 43) retrospectively suggests a connection between Timias and the kind of "griesly" figures that endanger the virtue of Florimell, for example, or inspire Belphoebe's wrath.

Belphoebe's first interaction with Timias sets the stage for his role as her victim, however unwittingly she might subject him to that doom. In

addition, it provides an overarching sense of extremism in regard to her virtue that undercuts the reverence commonly accorded Diana. Unlike Britomart, whose position as the hunter finds balance with the knowledge that she must eventually relinquish that role, Belphoebe, as an obstinate virgin figure, never surrenders. Notably, the narrator critiques Belphoebe's virtue by pointing out the fruitlessness of her position. As she nurses Timias back to health, Belphoebe unwittingly inspires his love but gives him no room to act on that desire. In reference to Belphoebe's dual-edged ministrations, the narrator exclaims:

Oh foolishe Physick, and vnfruitfull paine,  
That heales up one and makes another wound...  
What bootes it him from death to be vnbound,  
To be captiued in endlesse durance  
Of sorrow and despaire without aleggeaunce?  
(III. v. 42)

Here, Spenser's narrator does not blame Timias for loving an unobtainable woman but chides Belphoebe for her "foolish Physick." And though he embeds this criticism amidst many flourishes of praise, the poet-speaker's question nags the reader and mars Belphoebe's "perfect loue and spotlesse fame" (v. 54). She, like Elizabeth herself, ignores the Garden's adherence to God's "mightie word...to increase and multiply" (vi. 34). Invoking the Bible's own terminology, Spenser aligns the Garden's philosophy with holiness and divine purpose. By extension, then, anything or anyone to the contrary moves dangerously close to blasphemy. Roche deems readings that infer a critique of Belphoebe's refusal to acknowledge or return Timias' affections as "absolutely wrong. The figure of Belphoebe as virginity makes this ending impossible, a violation of character, allegory, and decorum" (138). Looking

more closely at the narrator's language in reference to Belpheobe, however, undoes the certainty with which Professor Roche disclaims these readings.

The first indication of Spenser's subtle critique lies in the way in which Spenser places Belpheobe's virtue on the margins of both the mythic and historic worlds. Philippa Berry notes:

The *Faerie Queene* accorded Elizabeth as a female beloved greater imaginative or spiritual powers than ever before. Simultaneously, it restricted the exercise of these powers in the world of human affairs, by distinguishing between two different spheres of existence, the mythic and the historical, which paralleled the Platonic division between an ideal and a real world. (153)

By aligning Belpheobe with Elizabeth, the suggestion persists that Belpheobe's virtue, martial and formidable in the "ideal" world, does not translate into the "real" world. Although her virginity is an element of Gloriana's realm, which Spenser claims to parallel England, it remains safely cloistered within the confines of a fictive enterprise. Britomart's virtue implies a hardier strain than the cross-bred virtue of Belpheobe. Britomart and her chastity do intersect with the mythic realm, however, she is fully capable of inhabiting the "real" world.

Notably, Belpheobe disappears from Book III following the sixth canto's oft-cited stanza in which Spenser "praises" her virtue and encourages all women to follow in her wake. The speaker states: "For thy she standeth on the highest staire / Of th'honorable stage of womanhead, That ladies all may follow her ensample dead" (III. v. 54). And indeed, her example is, literally, a "dead" one. Where Britomart exemplifies a chastity that is more than a

negative virtue, Belphoebe's version depends entirely on the "steadfast refusal to be seduced" (Brill 25). Moreover, as Mary Villeponteaux notes:

If Belphoebe's virginity stands 'on the highest staire' are we to understand that Britomart's movement toward holy matrimony is deficient, a somewhat lesser version of chastity? This would have to be our understanding of the matter if it were not for the fact that Spenser so carefully undercuts all the praise he heaps with equal care on Belphoebe, his queen's avatar. (42-43)

And certainly Belphoebe's ensuing absence from Book III undercuts Roche's certainty that Spenser's depiction of Belphoebe does not cast a skewed glance on her virginity and, by extension, that of Elizabeth.

The story of Belphoebe and Timias leads the narrator to an explanation of Belphoebe and Amoret's birth and thus to the fertile and endlessly regenerative Garden of Adonis. Shifting to this fecund landscape emphasizes the degree to which Belphoebe's and Elizabeth's barren chastity differs from that championed by Book III. Villeponteaux explains, in reference to the relationship between Belphoebe and Elizabeth I, that "Spenser's depiction of Belphoebe suggests that Elizabeth's motto *semper eadem*, contains an implicit threat because ultimately it does not permit male desire. Elizabeth is 'always the same,' an obdurate presence, the body natural of a woman transformed into an immutable public presence" (44). Indeed, Elizabeth's motto and Belphoebe's demeanor oppose the procreative philosophy of the Garden: the heart of "The Legend of Chastity." The Garden is *never* the same, presenting the model of productive chastity carefully enveloped within the world of ideals: Faery land. There, the Garden exists where it could not within the



fallen, historical world. Though, like Britomart, Belphoebe herself never appears within the Garden's walls, her virtue, I would argue, finds its roots there. Villeponteaux notes that "the resonant image connected with Belphoebe is the rose carefully closing up its 'silken leaves' in self-defense. But this withholding of body and emotion carries its own dangers" (37). Belphoebe's "dainty Rose, the daughter of her Morne" (III. v. 51), though remarkably beautiful, remains resoundingly temporal. In the Garden that kind of vulnerability sacrifices itself to the regenerative cycles characterizing this locale and dictated by that "great enemy...wicked *Time*:"

...who with his scythe addrest,  
Does mow the flowring herbes and goodly things,  
And all their glory to the ground downe flings...  
He flyes about and with his flaggy wings  
Beates down both leaues and buds without regard,  
Ne euer pittie may relent his malice hard. (vi. 39)

Here, the floral images recall Belphoebe's rose and emphasize her virtue's fragility. Belphoebe's ability to protect herself and her virtue by "lapp[ing] vp her silken leaues most chaire" (v. 50), avoiding "Middayes scorching powre," the "sharp Northerne wind" and the "froward skyes...lowre" rejects the Garden's philosophy. Even as she participates in the nature's cycle, Belphoebe's efforts at self-preservation deny it and Berger's aforementioned notion of rooting an image of life within the context of death. Clearly, Belphoebe's rose, often seen as suggesting the Tudor rose, *will* be mown down. Without Britomart's desire to repeat, however, Belphoebe's flower of virginity promises the end of her line. Certainly Britomart is also subject to Time but her procreative role allows her to be, like "the father of all formes" Adonis himself, "eterne in mutabilitie:" her goal is eternal even if she is not.

The Garden factors into Britomart's evolving "chaste desire" as a source for the book's various versions of chastity and from which Britomart draws her composite virtue. Turning to Amoret, perhaps, the reader finds this point manifested most clearly. Separated from Belpheobe, Amoret is brought to the Garden by Venus. According to Roche, "Amoret's presence on the Garden completes Spenser's hierarchy of generation and presents a view of marriage that integrates the joys of human sexuality into the cosmic scheme of generation" (127). Clearly, Amoret assumes a position in the Garden similar to Britomart's outside the Garden's gates. Amoret represents chaste, married love, Britomart's ultimate goal. It seems odd, then, that Spenser would not have placed Britomart within the Garden. However, as a mythic ideal, Amoret, more than Britomart, "belongs" to the Garden and its philosophy. She is, after all, the foster child of Psyche and Cupid "lessoned / In all the lore of love, and goodly womanhead" (vi. 51). Significantly Amoret does not grow-up alone in the Garden. Pleasure, the child of Cupid and Psyche, shares the lessons Amoret learns. Returning for a moment to Roche's reading of Belpheobe, the reader recalls his sense that the poem contains no critique of Belpheobe's abstinent chastity. Roche claims that the feuding Diana and Venus, foster mothers of Belpheobe and Amoret respectively, represent the opposing states of marriage and virginity. The figure of Chrysogenea, the twins' birth-mother, he goes on to argue, signifies:

the essential equality of these two estates as a way to God and the essential unity of these two estates as modes of existence. To leave no doubt about their equality and unity Spenser leads the reader onto the Garden of Adonis, that great philosophic poem of praise of life and generation, which is the ultimate answer to those who would make virginity the absolute human ideal. (115-116)

Roche's claims to equality and unity, I would argue, are not supported but rather undone in the Garden. The fertile Garden, as we have seen, is precisely the opposite of the protective and martial virginity of Belphebe. The union of virginity and marriage signals the end of abstinent virginity but not of chastity. In the Garden, the substance of chastity "is not chaunged, nor altered, But th'only forme and outward fashion." Just as Britomart's quest acknowledges this reality, so too does the Garden leave room for this metamorphosis. Married sexuality alters the exterior of chastity: abstinent virginity transforms into married sexuality. The substance of the virtue remains unchanged despite alteration to its outward form. If marriage subsumes abstinence, then, they cannot be "equal" as Roche asserts. Moreover, the presence of Pleasure, the product of soul (Psyche) and love (Cupid) suggests sexual delight: an impossibility within the context of virginity. Amoret, however, matures within this unity of heart and soul. As an inhabitant of the Garden and a representative of married monogamy, Amoret could, reasonably, function as an internal reminder to Britomart: her ideal model or conscience. However, within Spenser's narrative, Amoret does not remain within the Garden's walls. As Roche notes, "Amoret is not only a part of the Garden's hierarchy of generation but a figure in the action of the poem and carries the lesson of the Garden into the poem as a whole" (116). That lesson, however, cannot survive outside the Garden. Moving toward her union with Scudamour and thus her courtly destiny, Amoret finds herself assaulted, abducted, and unable to defend herself.

Clearly, Amoret proves ill-equipped to function outside of the Garden's earthy and generative milieu. Cheney explains:

In the Garden of Adonis love has no meaning apart from this physical context. The frankness of love there, its freedom from rancor or envy (III. vi. 41), is accompanied by a similar freedom from the stratagems by which the erotic impulse is made a means to power...Amoret's naiveté takes the form of an inability to handle the abstracted language of courtly love in isolation from the physical context in which she has been educated. (123)

"Amoret's naiveté," I would add, is due only in part to her failure to understand the "abstracted" language of the court. Cheney explains that much attention has been given to identifying the "meaning" of Busirane, for example, and why he is able to so thoroughly vanquish Amoret. It is more pertinent in this context, however, to examine what it is about the Garden itself that "has been so one sided as to have left [Amoret] unable to break free from his [Busirane's] enchantments, at the same time it has given her the strength to resist his temptations" (Cheney 122). The Garden's flaw is its insularity. Although its separateness allows for its protective, womb-like aura its walls insulate it from the already nebulous and untenable world of Faery land. The Garden, and therefore Amoret's source of knowledge regarding love and desire, is twice removed from Briton, the realm of "reality" in this fictional narrative. In addition, she is the passive recipient of knowledge. Amoret is "tendered" and "lessoned"(vi. 51) by Psyche. The Garden bestows Amoret's education upon her just as Venus does Amoret's position in the Garden when she deposits her there. Amoret is continually acted upon and, within the safety of the Garden that "none might through breake, nor overstride"(vi. 31), she is perfectly safe. In the world outside the Garden, Britomart's education consists of all that Amoret's tutelage cannot. Britomart, quite simply, learns the "rules" of love:

[In the Castle Joyeous] Britomart does not know the rules. When this happens, the makebelieve world suddenly becomes real, and we are left with the spectacle of Adonis dying in the arms of Venus or of Britomart wounded. With the wound comes a realization that love is something other than an interior passion. (Roche 70)

In the Garden, love remains "makebelieve." It is benign and ideal because Spenser suspends the rules. Cupid is "thoroughly domesticated" (Cheney 122), "laying his sad darts aside" (III. vi. 49) upon entering the Garden. "Fell rancor [and] fond gealosie" (vi. 41) play no part in this love. The weakness of Amoret is the weakness of a love untried by the substantive realm and that can only exist within this controlled and idyllic environment. Britomart's journey through the snares and rituals of courtly romance challenges this internalized, exemplary love by drawing it out of the Garden. In Britomart's interpretive journey, love eventually learns the rules and adapts the mythic ideal to survive in and contribute to the historical real.

Simply removing chastity from the protection of the Garden, however, does not guarantee a hardier breed of the virtue. Florimell, for example, exists outside Faery Land. She, like Britomart, initiates her own search for Marinell, the man she loves and eventually marries. As the reader later learns, Florimell left court "and vowed neuer to retorne againe, / Till him aliue or dead she did inuent" (III. v. 10). At this point, little difference seems to exist between the quest of Florimell and that of Britomart. Florimell, however, finds her search repeatedly thwarted as she is perpetually pursued by masculine desire. And while Britomart certainly encounters obstacles in her search for Artegall, as we have seen, each adds to her interpretive repertoire. The piteous Florimell seems to gain only in endurance and running speed. In

fact, as Lesley Brill points out, this sense of comic disproportion with regard to the degree of persecution Florimell suffers defines a central difference between Florimell and Britomart:

The comedy of the hapless Florimell demonstrates just how important a part of Chastity its 'wise and warlike' components are...In her person Spenser discredits the idea that Chastity is a negative virtue; that it involves no more than a steadfast refusal to be seduced. In Spenser's terms Florimell is unchaste. She is as untouched by the sexual fires of Britomart as she is by Busyrane's demonism. If she preserves herself for Marinell (who does not protect himself very well either), it is largely because of the ludicrous incompetence of her assailants. (25)

Brill's assertion that Florimell is "unchaste" strikes as a bit harsh considering Florimell is victimized by unbridled male passion and strives to do nothing more than preserve herself and her integrity. Recalling the libidinous Malecasta whose name means, literally, "badly chaste" (MacLean and Prescott 240), the reader finds a truly unchaste character. Florimell, however, provides an example of an individual being "badly chaste" in the sense that she expresses her chastity and responds to assaults against it poorly; she merely flees. Moreover, her desire lacks the "streightened course" of providence to give it nobility. Florimell cannot match Britomart's noble drive to give birth to the foundation of a great nation. Her quest, entirely individual, arises from within but her goal does not extend itself beyond that. Merlin assuages Britomart's fear of narcissism and that she loves a mere "shade" (III. ii. 44) by assuring her of Artegall's reciprocal affection. Florimell flees from court with the full knowledge that though "all her delight is set on *Marinell*; / ...he sets nought at all by *Florimell*" (III. v. 9). Her quest lacks a broader purpose from

the outset and Florimell ultimately suggests an alternative to Britomart by representing what occurs without the influence of "heavenly destiny."

Significantly, Florimell embarks on her quest undisguised. Britomart's borrowed robes allow her a masculine facade and, more importantly, access to the male realm of "Aduentr'ous knighthood" (III. iii. 57). Her disguise saves her from the fate of Florimell and the dangers inherent in her visible femininity. Unlike Malecasta, whose unsavory character finds reinforcement in her lustful deeds, Florimell's misguided chastity arises in part from her vision-less quest and in part from who she is: a "hapless" woman. Her continual state of fear and flight never raises her to the position of power, however temporary, that Britomart's role provides. Rather, as the poet-speaker notes, Florimell is never safe from danger: she interprets each new scenario in which she finds herself through the same lens. The lustful "griesly Foster" (III. i. 17) engenders the same response as Arthur and his seemingly noble attempt at rescue. Similarly, Proteus' appearance to save Florimell from the violent desire of the fisherman does not give Florimell cause for relief. Rather, she "chaung'd from one to other feare" (III. viii. 33) and desires freedom from Proteus as well. Armed with her femininity rather than borrowed masculinity, Florimell remains the hapless fair whose quest might originate with chaste desire but is perpetuated by the compulsion to flee rather than to repeat.

The significance of this particular compulsion presents itself after Proteus "rescues" Florimell and proceeds to imprison her beneath the ocean. Spenser's poet-speaker notes:

Eternal thralldome was to her more lief,  
 then losse of chastitie, or chaunge of loue:  
 Die had she rather in tormenting grieve,  
 Then any should of falsenesse her reprove... (III. viii. 42)

Certainly the narrator does not critique steadfast dedication to virtue. These lines, however, do touch upon the manner in which that dedication manifests itself. Florimell is, as Roche asserts, "beautiful, elusive, and passive" (150) throughout the narrative. That passivity suggests that Florimell prefers the stasis of "eternall thralldome" to losing her virtue. Ironically, though, her stasis keeps her confined by fear and proves almost fatal. Her negative virtue provides a space for the witch's false Florimell and that censure of "falsenesse" which Florimell fears more than death.

More importantly for our purposes, Florimell's passivity stands in direct opposition to all that the Garden represents. The "eternall thralldome" of fear to which her quest for love subjects her excludes her from the cyclical and productive atmosphere of the Garden. Admittedly, Florimell and Marinell eventually unite; however, that marriage does not come easily nor within this book. Elizabeth Heale reminds us of the important role Proteus plays in setting Florimell apart from the Garden's philosophy and, in my reading, in asserting her position as an anti-Britomart. Heale explains that, "[m]ost familiarly for Renaissance thinkers, Proteus represented First Matter, the material from which all things are made...Such primary matter should be a perpetual generative source. Proteus is another figure for the chaos that lies beneath the Garden of Adonis" (84) and, I would add, that fuels Britomart's quest. Florimell's repeated denial of Proteus in his many forms certainly expresses her steadfast chastity but, in terms of his role as "First Matter," her



refusals can also indicate the sterility and futility of denying generation and productivity. Heale states that:

In Britomart's case, the private bond of marriage is to be the source of wider social and national orders. In the case of Florimell and Marinell, the disrupted bond of love becomes the symbolic source of wider disruptions, both in society and nature. (84)

Florimell's imprisonment is both a literal and a figurative one. Proteus traps her within his underwater lair but so too does Florimell trap herself. Her vision of chastity finds its ultimate goal perpetually thwarted because it does not allow for change. And significantly, in Book III, Florimell cannot transform the "disruptions" in her quest as Britomart can. When, for example, faced with the fear of first loving Artegall's image and then of losing him prematurely, Britomart translates her anxiety into productive activity. Florimell initially follows a course of action but never escapes from fear. As an anti-Britomart, Florimell provides a warning against becoming too "enthralled" by fear to be productive. Additionally, her own expression of chastity leads to a fruitless cycle of fear and flight rather than to the Garden's productive vitality.

The ability to transform chastity, then, becomes a hallmark of Britomart's quest. And indeed, the metamorphosis of her virtue functions as part of a larger process within the poem that, as Cheney explains, "places increasing emphasis on the necessity of reconciling differences and of recognizing the extent to which in any case man's life in this world involves a working compromise between his higher and lower natures" (10). Britomart is that working compromise. Her virtue finds its roots in the "higher nature"

of the Garden but adapts itself to survive in the "lower nature" of the fallen world. Florimell, at least in Book III, never recognizes that difference and thus remains trapped until Book IV. Britomart, however, moves on. Empowered by the Garden's dynamic chastity but tempered by her experiences, she is able to save Amoret from Busirane. It is important to note that, despite her "superiority" to Amoret in terms of navigating within the courtly realm, Britomart is not perfect. She is merely more complete from having integrated the Garden's philosophy of chastity and the realities of her own world. Amoret's one-sidedness, on the other hand, leaves her completely helpless. Upon arriving at the House of Busirane, Britomart finds Amoret "bounden fast, that did her ill become, / And her small wast girt round with yron bands, / Unto a brasen pillour, by the which she stands" (vi. 30). Amoret cannot decipher Busirane's "straunge characters" (III. xii. 31) and her ignorance traps her.

Despite her accumulated knowledge, Britomart confronts difficulty in the house as well. Having not yet completed her quest, Britomart's virtue is still evolving, and thus still vulnerable. Her difficulty in deciphering the meaning behind the repeated written commands to "*Be Bold*" (III. xi) marks her greatest interpretive challenge. Her difficulty does not incapacitate her but does leave room for Busirane to wound her. Despite her uncertainty, however, Britomart proceeds "boldly" into the unknown: "She was no whit thereby discouraged / From prosecuting of her first intent, / But forward with bold steps into the next roome went" (xi. 50). The woman who enters the castle of Busirane "as a thunder bolt / Perceth the yielding ayre" (xi. 25) exemplifies a chaste, desirous fortitude that began in the ideal of the Garden

but that, necessarily, moves beyond it. This is the progression for which the Garden prepares Britomart. In the process of defeating Busirane and her earlier opponents, Britomart becomes a composite character. Clearly she shares the martial characteristics of Belpheobe and possesses the anxiety of Amoret; however she moves forward toward a procreative chastity that can survive in her own historical realm.

Certainly the reunion of Scudamour and Amoret also implies a fruitful coupling. Their embrace at the close of Book III in the 1596 edition suggests ways in which Britomart has subsumed and reinterpreted Amoret's brand of chastity. Upon Amoret's rescue from the castle, she and Britomart return to Scudamour who has long been mourning the loss of his beloved. Their reunion produces the oft-cited and much studied Hermaphrodite image. The poet-speaker states that:

Had ye them seene, ye would haue surely thought,  
That they had beene that faire *Hermaphrodite*,  
...So seemd those two, as growne together quite,  
That *Britomart* halfe enuying their blesse,  
Was much empassiond in her gentle sprite,  
And to herselfe oft wisht like happinesse,  
In vaine she wisht, that fate n'ould let her yet possesse.  
(xii. 46a)

Here, Spenser suggests that Britomart, while clearly desiring unity with her own beloved, only "halfe" envies their "blesse." "Crucial to her wish for 'like happinesse,' when faced with the embracing couple," notes Silberman, "is the implied possibility of repetition with a difference" (69). Indeed, Britomart and Artegall's union *should not* be like Amoret's and Scudamour's. Britomart,

unlike Amoret who becomes the literal victim of her fears in the house of Busirane, keeps her fear carefully sublimated. Like the boar, buried beneath Venus and Adonis' bower, Britomart's fear de-stabilizes but does not destroy her quest. When faced with the Hermaphrodite, then, Britomart wishes for a chastity that combines the accumulated knowledge of the Garden with her own experiences in the world outside. Understandably, Britomart cannot replicate the Garden's mythic ideal in her realm. The Garden's version of chastity requires the climate-controlled environment within its walls. This is not to say that the Garden loses its efficacy or that Britomart finds its chastity imperfect. As has been asserted, the Garden presents her with the ideal of unfallen, eternally procreative love. Britomart, however, can only bring a revised version with her into Book IV: a rendering that still finds its origins in the Garden but that can withstand the snares of the courtly realm.

Britomart's quest does function differently than its predecessors. Book III begins a movement away from those journeys strictly defined and confined by Gloriana toward the pastoral of Book VI and its relative freedom from courtly mores. Britomart is an injection of the historical into the mythical: a self-guided knight in a world where that defies the norm. Moreover, the seat of her virtue does not rest at Gloriana's court but within an organic landscape whose topography does not permit the kind of stasis inherent in the queen's virginity. Notably, however, the Garden's natural elements are guided by convention. The arbor and mount in the Garden's center, for example, present conventional elements in a Renaissance Garden.<sup>9</sup> In other words, though Britomart's quest originates naturally it is directed by tradition and established courtly codes. As such, she does not remain

solipsistic in her quest. Destiny guides her glance away from her individual reflection to the image of Artegall, her future and that of her country. In Spenser's ideology, Elizabeth's refusal to marry and bear children never allows her to shift from an individual to a collective perspective. As Spenser urges his queen to peer "in mirrours more than one her selfe to see" (Proem 5), he aligns her with Britomart and her fateful glance. Notably, however, the queen's reflection does not contain the divine guidance of Britomart's. The queen may "chuse" to see herself as "*Gloriana... / Or in Belphoebe* fashioned be" which returns us to the threat of Narcissism. Elizabeth only reflects herself and her static virginity: a fatal and fruitless enterprise. Britomart, however, looks for herself and finds Artegall.

In this "destined" act Spenser begins a subtle process of deconstruction. By the time the reader reaches the Garden, Spenser has long been at work disassembling the sovereign's unchanging virtue and building up Britomart's, a chastity that depends upon the ability to metamorphose and reinterpret itself. Boehrer notes that:

...the Garden of Adonis...reaffirms the organic model of order, while insisting upon mutability as that orders first characteristic...for what passes as chastity in book 3 [sic] of *The Faerie Queene* is both an eternal substance and a succession of mutable forms...but what is that eternal substance?...In place of this eternal substance we must at once recognize the substance of book 3 [sic] to be nothing less than the very process of organic reproduction upon which all of its action hinges. And this process is specifically that of conception, imaged in the heart of the Garden of Adonis.  
(555-56)

And, I would add, in the knight of chastity herself. By normalizing the Garden's and Britomart's reproductive process at the expense of the queen's

abstinence, Spenser undercuts the sovereign's position as autonomous and inviolable. Placing Elizabeth outside the norm does not highlight her exceptional status but suggests a fundamental lack. Exiled to the margins of her own dominion, much as Belphoebe is displaced from the central narrative of Book III, the "unnatural" queen can no longer threaten the male hegemony that her virtue excludes. Berry sees this act of displacement as a masculine design to control that which remained physically out of reach: the queen's virginity. "Many literary texts influenced by these Renaissance attitudes are punctuated by an anxiety that the beloved's passive power might suddenly seek active expression in an assertion of her own feelings and desires which threaten to escape the rhetorical or imaginative control of the male lover" (Berry 4). Britomart, then, participates in deposing the queen's virtue through her position as the vehicle for the Garden's organic process. By seeking Artegall, she allows what abstinent virginity never will. As such, Britomart's figure implicitly critiques the queen and signals a break with the courtly atmosphere in which she was created by Spenser. Ironically, Spenser directly links Britomart to the court when he posits Britomart and Artegall's union as the genesis of the Tudor line. Merlin informs Britomart that she shall eventually give rise to a "royall virgin" whose reign "shall / Stretch her white rod ouer the *Belgicke* shore..." (III. iii. 49). According to Spenser's fictional genealogy, had Britomart refused to transform her virginal chastity to married monogamy, Elizabeth would not be at all. Abstinent virginity, through this lens, endangers the very perpetuity of England by threatening its monarchy. Retrospectively, the proem to Book III casts an interesting hue over the stanzas that follow. When Spenser offers Elizabeth the images of

both Belpheobe and Gloriana he acknowledges the queen's two bodies. Less overtly, he calls attention to the fact that, without accepting marriage and the Garden's chaste productivity, Elizabeth's "rule" and "rare chastitee" base themselves on a singular rather than a collective image. Though Spenser provides her with "mirrours more than one," Elizabeth's glance will only ever reproduce itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth's unmarried status persisted throughout her reign from 1558 to 1603. David Bevington notes in the introduction to *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 4th ed., (New York: Harper Collins, 1992) that Elizabeth's "combination of imperious will and femininity and her brilliant handling of her many contending male admirers have become legendary. She remained unmarried throughout her life, in part, at least, because marriage would have upset the delicate balance she maintained among rival groups, both foreign and domestic" (xx). Moreover, marriage for Elizabeth would include relinquishing her position as sole, divinely sanctioned monarch of England to her husband. Her unmarried, virgin status, though controversial, assumed mythic proportions as her unassailable virtue became synonymous with England's own integrity. Elizabeth's refusal to marry, produce male heirs and thus become a part of the patriarchal hierarchy provides fertile ground for contemporary feminist critics. See Philippa Berry's *Of Chastity and Power*, (New York: Routledge, 1990) and Diana Henderson's *Passion Made Public*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995) for recent studies of Elizabeth's role in framing the literature of her era, the importance of gender in Elizabethan texts, and the interaction between male courtier poet and Elizabeth as the object of male desire.

<sup>2</sup> See J. W. Bennett, "Spenser's Garden of Adonis." *PMLA* xlvii (1932), 46-80. See also her article in *JEGP* xli (1942), 53-78, "Spenser's Garden of Adonis Revisited." In these essays Professor Bennett first explores and then vigorously defends her view that the Garden is "a supernatural, or other world realm...Spenser's Garden combines features of three closely related conventions: a myth tradition of the abode of souls between incarnations, pictorial features of various descriptions of paradise, and the philosophical and theological concept of an immaterial world, created before the material world and serving as a pattern for it" (*JEGP*, xli, 54). Brents Stirling takes Bennett's Neoplatonic reading to task in his essays "The Philosophy of Spenser's 'Garden of Adonis'" in *PMLA* xlix (1934), 501-38 and in "Spenser's 'Platonic' Garden," *JEGP* xli (1942) 482-488. Stirling, in these discussions, emphasizes his belief that Spenser's notions in the Garden "were undoubtedly Platonic at base, with the union of Platonism and Ovid's 'Philosophy of turned shapes' found in Golding's translation, as the probable and immediate inspiration" (*PMLA* xlix (1934), 538). Robert Ellrodt's *Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Spenser* (Geneva, 1960) and John Hankin's *Source and Meaning in Spenser's Allegory* (Oxford, 1971) provide extensive studies of Spenser's probable sources as well. More recently, Harry Berger explores the Garden and its many features through the lens of gender discourse in "Actaeon at the Hinder Gate: The Stag Party in Spenser's Gardens of Adonis," *From Desire in the Renaissance: Psychoanalysis and Literature*. Ed. Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz, (Princeton, 1994: 91-119).

<sup>3</sup> Hugh MacLean and Anne Lake Prescott divide the garden passage into four "stages" which provide, in my view, the most straight forward manner of viewing the Garden's composition. The stanza divisions I use in my essay are theirs. MacLean and Prescott's 'stages' do not alter my own reading of the Garden as the locus of Britomart's virtue and perhaps even as her own

internal landscape. Their divisions provides but one method of managing the baffling and disparate elements of the Garden itself.

<sup>4</sup> Ellrodt defines this term earlier in his text. He explains that "all living beings not fully developed in the first act of creation -- whether plants, beasts or bodies of men -- were preformed in the *rationes seminales*, or invisible germs...All things created at once... are brought to blossom, as it were, at proper intervals and 'according to their kinds' out of those hidden *rationes* which 'God has scattered like seeds' (77).

<sup>5</sup> Silberman, in her text, Transforming Desire - Erotic Knowledge in Books III and IV of *The Faerie Queene*. (Berkeley, 1995), finds the lack of certainty within the Garden's walls ultimately unsettling. In the Garden, she states, "the risk involved is the risk of subjective engagement that Britomart faces in her quest. Like Britomart, readers are denied certainty..." (48). Berger's "Actaeon at the Hinder Gate" discusses "the problems that confront the male narrator -- indeed the problems displayed and performed by the narrator -- as he tries to rectify the injustices of the dominant discourses by imagining an eroto-matriarchal idyll of fulfilled Venerean desire" (92). Put plainly he studies the Garden from the perspective of the masculine narrator and the female reader. His essay is a response to Maureen Quilligan's account of "gendered reading" in her text Milton's Spenser (Berger 93). Berger aligns the masculine view of the Garden with the vantage point of Actaeon as he gazed upon Venus and thus places the male reader in a position of immanent danger (93).

<sup>6</sup> Hankin, Source and Meaning in Spenser's Allegory. (247).

<sup>7</sup> In his essay "'God' As Structure In Spenser's Garden of Adonis." English Studies. 1982 Aug.; 63 (4); 301-307, William Johnson suggests that the Garden can be viewed in two ways. He sees the Garden one-dimensionally, as three concentric circles, or two-dimensionally, as three concentric circles "with the outer and middle circles on a flat plain and...the inner circle forming the base of a cone, the Mount, rising triangularly out of it" (303). Harry Berger identifies three gardens at work within Spenser's text. His chapter, "Spenser's Garden of Adonis: Force and Form in the Renaissance Imagination," In Revisionary Play. (Los Angeles: 1988). 131-153.

sees the garden at the close of Canto vi as a "tableau [holding] a multitude of references, meanings, feelings, and suggestions together so that they continually act on each other, move and change as we look at the image"(153). Neuse's "Planting Words in the Soul: Spenser's Socratic Garden of Adonis," Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual. 1987; 8; 79-100. equates the Derridean notion of "freeplay" to the Garden of Adonis' "mutabilitie." Neuse goes on to explore a connection between Saussure's *differance* and Adonis himself as well as drawing a dialectical connection between the garden and Adonis similar to that between speech and language (89). Elizabeth Heale, in her text The Faerie Queene: A Reader's Guide (Cambridge, 1987) and Bartlett Giamatti in his The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic (Norton, 1966) each present readings of the Garden defined by stanzas in a manner similar to MacLean and Prescott but differing in their understanding of the symbolic import of those divisions.

<sup>8</sup> Ovid's *The Metamorphoses*, Book X

<sup>9</sup> Beretta describes the traditional structural features that characterize a Renaissance garden on pages 43-44 of her study.



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## VITA

Alyssa Jane Sveden

Born in Wellesley, Massachusetts, May 2, 1972. Graduated from Franklin High School in Franklin, Massachusetts, June 1990, B.A., Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont, May 1994. Teaching intern at The Colorado Springs School in Colorado Springs, Colorado, July 1994 to June 1995. In August 1995, the writer entered the College of William and Mary as an M.A. candidate.

Currently, the author is employed as an Admissions Counselor at Middlebury College in Vermont.